



himml

Magazine

SUMMER 2024



On the Cover

In Gomitogo, Mali, HMML partner Babou Traore examines manuscripts created by three generations of scribes in the Diakite family. One of the Diakite family scribes was present at the meeting, which took place during a HMML visit to villages near Djenné, Mali, in March 2021.

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HMML Magazine

Is published twice a year in support of HMML's mission: to preserve and share the world's handwritten past to inspire a deeper understanding of our present and future.

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Cynthia Saboe—Editorial Review

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The Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML)

is a global organization that advances manuscript research and scholarly inquiry by digitally preserving, providing access to, and interpreting manuscript collections around the world. HMML places a special priority on manuscripts in regions endangered by war, political instability, or other threats. HMML is currently preserving manuscript collections at sites in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Gaza, Great Britain, India, Iraq, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Mauritania, Montenegro, Nepal, Pakistan, Slovenia, and Yemen. With approximately 450,000 manuscripts photographed in partnership with more than 800 libraries worldwide, HMML offers the world's largest collection of resources for the study of manuscript cultures. View the manuscripts in Reading Room (vhmml.org).

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Father Columba Stewart, OSB

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Dear Friends,

This issue of the magazine marks a turning point in HMML’s international projects: we’ve completed our digitization work in Mali, our most expansive effort in 60 years of photographing manuscripts. We’re still active in West Africa, though on a smaller scale, with a new project in Mauritania. The country is a cultural bridge between Morocco and West Africa, as shown even in its name; people in Mauritania will introduce themselves as “Moors,” referencing the North African origins of the country’s Islamic culture.

Completing the work in Bamako, Timbuktu, and Djenné allows us to redeploy resources to areas of need and to regions with potential for growth. We’ve been paying close attention to opportunities in South Asia, and I spent much of early February in India maintaining relationships and developing new partnerships. As of now, the principal focus is Islamic manuscripts written in Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Malayalam, as well as a project devoted to palm-leaf copies of the Hindu Vedas. India could keep us busy for years to come, building on our work more than a decade ago with Christian collections in Kerala. We’ve also developed a series of projects in Pakistan, another area of great potential.

As you know, HMML’s work began in Europe and we’ve never left. We’re ramping up projects with Christian collections in the countries that emerged from the former Yugoslavia even as we maintain our momentum in Malta, Italy, and the United Kingdom with manuscripts and archives related to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem—see pages 6–7 for a glimpse inside a HMML Malta Study Center project in London.

In Minnesota, the task of keeping all these collections available for future generations is ongoing. In the following pages you’ll see just a sample of some of these activities, including one of the many steps that HMML is taking for long-term digital data preservation and security.

Every turn of world events reminds us that our mission is of the moment, though devoted to preserving the memory of the past. Thank you for what you do to make it possible.

Sincerely,

Columba Stewart, OSB

Father Columba Stewart, OSB
Executive Director



ABOVE: Meeting new partners in February 2024 at Patthar Wale Saheb Dargah, a library housed at an important shrine in Hyderabad, India. Members of the HMML team—Walid Mourad (right) and Fr. Columba Stewart (second from right)—were joined by Professor Chander Shekar (second from left) and Dr. Syed Abdul Mohaimin Qadri (center), as well as Dr. Qadri’s brother, Syed Abdul Mutaal Quadri (left), and son, Syed Abdul Lateef Laoubali Quadri (front, center).

A Decade in Mali

By Columba Stewart

It began with a dinner in 2013. A HMML board member found himself seated next to Deborah Stolk, then a program director with the Prince Claus Fund (PCF) in Amsterdam. He told Deborah about HMML, and she mentioned that PCF had helped fund the evacuation of manuscripts from Timbuktu.

We had all read about the occupation of Timbuktu by a coalition of armed groups in April 2012 and had seen photos of burning manuscripts. After the retaking of the city by French paratroopers in January 2013, it emerged that almost all of Timbuktu's libraries had been relocated to Bamako, Mali's capital, in advance of the occupation. As a result, relatively few manuscripts were found and destroyed.

I had a trip to Ethiopia in the works and arranged to meet Deborah at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam on my way home. She showed me photos of the 1,400



ABOVE: In Timbuktu in 2019, digitization technician Badji Cissé works on the manuscripts of Bibliothèque al-Cady al-Aqib. This library of the Jāmi' Sankūri, a mosque and madrasah, dates to the 14th century.

metal boxes—containing manuscripts from more than 30 family libraries—being transported by boat and truck to Bamako. I shared photos from HMML's recent projects and suggested that we might be able to help with digitization and online access. The result was an email introduction to Dr. Abdel Kader Haidara, a member of a prominent Timbuktu family and organizer of the rescue operation.

By August 2013, I was in Bamako with Walid Mourad (longtime HMML field director) to meet Dr. Haidara and his team at SAVAMA-DCI (Sauvegarde et Valorisation des Manuscrits et Défense de la Culture Islamique), a Malian NGO and cooperative of private library owners in Timbuktu, founded by Dr. Haidara in 1996.

Most of the evacuated manuscripts were still in metal boxes, stashed in apartments throughout Bamako. The move of the manuscripts from the desert climate of Timbuktu to the humidity of the capital posed a conservation challenge, compounded by the boxes being tightly packed without air circulation. Several international partners were helping with the rental of storage locations and the new SAVAMA-DCI headquarters, as well as with conservation and inventory of the contents of the boxes, but no one yet had come forward to support digitization. That would be HMML's contribution.

At the start of 2014, two HMML digitization studios were up and running in Bamako, and during the next few years the project grew to six studios, thanks in part to forward-thinking grants from Arcadia Fund in 2011 and 2015. The Juma Al-Majid Center for Culture and Heritage in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, contributed six more studios, managed by HMML after their first year of operation. As other partners fell away, Hamburg University emerged as the lead for conservation and inventories, with funding from the Gerda Henkel Stiftung and the German Foreign Ministry. In total, more than 292,000 manuscripts would be digitized in HMML's Bamako studios.

Soon we learned that in Timbuktu some manuscripts had survived—safely hidden at the three major mosques—and HMML began a collaboration with Sophie Sarin, a Swedish resident of Mali. She had



ABOVE: Dr. Abdel Kader Haidara (left) and Dr. Banzoumana Traore (right) of SAVAMA-DCI, meeting with HMML in Bamako on December 17, 2013.

recently met with families whose manuscripts remained in Timbuktu. They agreed to a digitization project, funded initially by the British Library's Endangered Archives Programme (EAP) then carried forward by HMML. Our three-year project in occupied Timbuktu, beset by logistical challenges, resulted in an additional 7,279 manuscripts digitized.

And then there was Djenné. The industrious Sarin had helped establish a community-based manuscript center next to the Great Mosque to provide a safe home for private collections. I had visited the site in 2013 and observed their digitization efforts, then funded by the EAP. When that grant ended in 2019, HMML kept the work going, photographing 2,567 manuscripts from more than 200 repositories.

HMML's digitization work in Mali is now complete, resulting in an estimated 4.25 million unique image files representing 302,000 manuscripts. Our work of cataloging these manuscripts for online access is underway and will continue for years.

Taken together, the projects in Bamako, Timbuktu, and Djenné were HMML's largest-ever investment

in manuscript photography. The launch of HMML's online Reading Room (vhmml.org) in 2015 was well positioned to receive the massive flow of images. Today, 130,000 manuscripts can be viewed in Reading Room—nearly 25,000 of these from Mali alone.

Over the course of a decade, the projects in Mali transformed HMML's collections from primarily European and Eastern Christian manuscripts to include the largest single online source of digitized Islamic manuscripts in the world. These materials, in turn, have supported new research, partnerships, and tools. Users of international databases—receiving catalog information from HMML Authority File—are benefiting from the identification of authors and texts from groups historically underrepresented in such systems. HMML is now digitizing Islamic collections in Mauritania, India, and Pakistan, in part thanks to our success in Mali. And around the world, people are connecting for the first time to images that give a dynamic view into the handwritten heritage of West Africa.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB, is executive director of HMML.

London

By Daniel K. Gullo

Nestled in the streets of London, just northwest of St. Paul's Cathedral, resides a fortified gatehouse known as St. John's Gate, whose hidden and crenelated façade reminds the astute observer of London's medieval past. The gatehouse is a remnant of the Priory of Clerkenwell, a large religious community founded in the 1140s to serve as a headquarters for the English members of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.

The Order of St. John emerged from a group of pilgrims to Jerusalem in the late 11th century. The group took simple, religious vows and remained in the city to provide hospital care to other pilgrims. In the first decades of the 12th century, the community

was established as a military-religious order in Jerusalem and quickly became a significant martial and political force during the Crusades and in the centuries that followed. At St. John's Gate in London today, one can still sense the legacy of the Order and its twofold mission: to defend the Christian faith and to care for the sick (begetting references to the Order and some of its members as "Knights of St. John" and "Knights Hospitaller").

The gatehouse's survival in modern London is remarkable. In England, the Order was suppressed by Queen Elizabeth I in 1559, and the library, archives, art, and buildings of Clerkenwell were confiscated. In 1831, French Hospitaller émigrés formed a Council of the Langue of England to promote the Order's revival in Great Britain. The revived English Order became an official Order of Chivalry of the British Crown, chartered by Queen Victoria in 1888. It remains one of the five recognized Orders of St. John whose historic roots reach back to 12th-century Jerusalem.

Central to the Order's restoration in Great Britain was the acquisition of St. John's Gate, its ancestral English home. There were also intensive efforts to build an archive, library, and art collection. As early as 1838, members began donating books, purchasing manuscripts, and acquiring art—reconstructing their identity from their cultural heritage. Today, the Museum of the Order of St. John curates a priceless collection, with exhibitions dedicated to the history of the Order from its medieval foundation to the present day, connecting its extraordinary past to present audiences and members of the Order.

Much of the collection was acquired from the dispersed archives and libraries of the Order that were closed in Europe during the Age of Revolution. For example, the collection in London includes materials from the priories of Pisa and Rome as well as French items primarily from the 18th century. Unique among the Italian works are an illustrated proof of nobility of Cesare Borgia da Velletri and a poem of the 1565 Great Siege of Malta, the latter written in a Sicilian dialect. Notable French materials include an illuminated ceremonial of profession for a Knight of St. John, as well as detailed commentaries about the Order's governance and administration of



ABOVE: An entrance to the gatehouse that holds the Museum of the Order of St. John, London. Above the door is the coat of arms of the Most Venerable Order of St. John of Jerusalem, and in a mosaic before the entrance is the cross of the Order of St. John.



ABOVE: An 18th-century watercolor map of the islands of Malta, Comino, and Gozo. Museum of the Order of St. John, London. (MOSJ 00413)

its properties. Through these and other items, one can see the formation of a working collection that was acquired to help restore the Order through the documentary evidence of its history.

The Malta Study Center began working with the Museum of the Order of St. John in October 2023 to digitize and catalog collection items such as manuscripts, archival material, maps, drawings, and printed material related to the history of the Order. The collaboration was launched as a pilot project funded by the RMW Foundation. The goal, if sufficient additional funding can be secured, is to complete the project over the next three years.

The work in London is part of a broader project initiated by the Malta Study Center (“France and Malta in the Age of Revolution, 1775–1815”) that will provide access to collections formed out of the tumult of revolutionary Europe. This period—in which the Order of St. John was transformed by its participation in world events, including the American War of Independence, the French Revolution, and the 1815 Concert of Europe at the Congress of Vienna—has yet to receive a comprehensive study utilizing a full array of sources, largely due to a lack of access to the materials. HMML Reading Room will provide that access.



ABOVE: A digitization studio operated by Dr. Steve Gill, a HMML associate conducting field site management and photography at the Museum of the Order of St. John, London.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Daniel K. Gullo is Joseph S. Micallef director of the Malta Study Center at HMML.

News in Brief

Highlights from HMML's cultural preservation initiatives and activities

Winter School in Archival Studies

In February 2024, HMML's Malta Study Center partnered with the University of Malta and the State Archives of Florence to offer HMML's first Winter School in Archival Studies, held in Florence, Italy.

The week-long course—"Malta and the Order of St. John in Europe (16th–18th centuries): Documents, People, Institutions"—guided students in the study of archival records related to Malta and the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, as found in the unique Hospitaller archives of Florence. Students were also introduced to modern conservation and digitization practices and visited archives throughout the city. Registration for the 2025 Winter School opens later this year; visit hmml.org/programs for details.

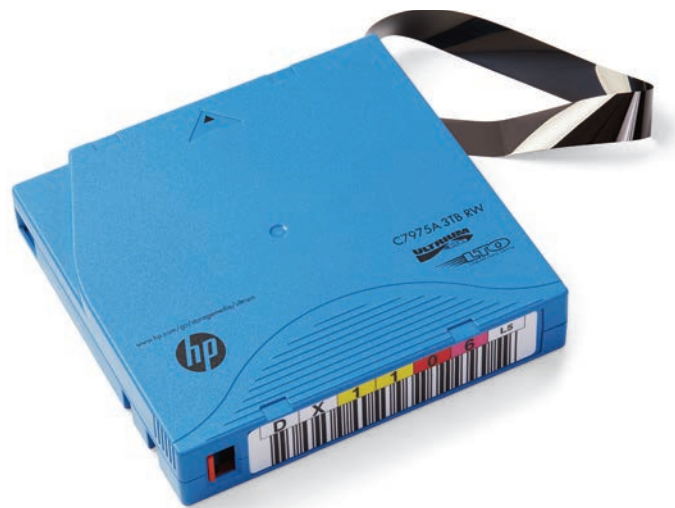


Digital Preservation Milestone

The preservation of digital information is a never-ending process. Following the practice of "lots of copies keep stuff safe," all of HMML's data is backed up on hard drives, servers, and tape cartridges. The tapes—LTO (Linear Tape Open) data cartridges, each containing more than 2,900 feet of magnetic tape—are stored off-site in a secure facility located in the mountains of Utah.

In 2020, HMML's tape storage provider began using a new, improved backup system and announced the eventual discontinuation of the older software. This meant that all data archived to earlier tapes had to be re-recorded on new tapes using the new system. Over a 14-month period beginning in late 2022, more than 400 hard drives from HMML partners were re-copied to tape. The project was valuable in proving the integrity of HMML's data-storage hardware, software, and processes.

More than 200 tapes—totaling 500 terabytes of data—now provide HMML's offline layer of data preservation, physically protected from hacking and ransomware. As technology evolves over time, HMML will continue to review and adapt its data preservation methodology.



Partnerships in India

As part of this year's site visits to support new and existing digitization projects, Fr. Columba Stewart (executive director of HMML) traveled the length of India with stops in New Delhi, Lucknow, Hyderabad, Calicut, Thrissur, and Kochi. He was joined by Walid Mourad and Rohan Chauhan, both working on HMML's field operations.

Beginning in New Delhi, the team visited the Ghalib Institute—whose collection of primarily Urdu manuscripts is being digitized by HMML—and signed a contract to begin digitization with Jamia Hamdard, a large Islamic center of higher education with 3,000 manuscripts. In Lucknow, the team visited ongoing projects with the Mahmudabad family library, Mumtazul Ulama Library, and Umdatul Ulama Library, then traveled to Hyderabad where they met with potential partners and signed a contract to digitize Persian, Urdu, and Arabic manuscripts at Patthar Wale Saheb Dargah.

The trip ended in the southern state of Kerala, where HMML's work in India began over a decade ago with manuscripts of the St. Thomas Christian communities. Hosted in Markaz Knowledge City by the Malaibar Foundation for Research and Development, the team saw manuscripts written in Arabic and Arabic Malayalam (the first form of written Malayalam) and signed a Letter of Intent to collaborate on digitization and cataloging. In Thrissur, the team visited a palm-leaf digitization project at the Vedic Research Center, an ancient site of Hindu learning. The journey closed with a joyful reunion in Kochi with Fr. Ignatius Payyappilly, archivist for the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church and one of HMML's first partners in India.

Notable

HMML STAFF AND ASSOCIATES PRESENT AT GLOBAL CONFERENCES

FEBRUARY 21, 2024

Critical African Heritages Workshop, Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (Evanston, Illinois, USA)

Speakers—Dr. Ali Diakite, Dr. Paul Naylor

Topic—Roundtable: Sources, Heritage, & Experimental History in Premodern Africa

APRIL 27, 2024

Mediterranean Seminar Workshop, St. Louis University

(St. Louis, Missouri, USA)

Speaker—Dr. Josh Mugler

Topic—The Subjected Sea in the Prayer of al-Shādhilī

MAY 9–11, 2024

International Congress on Medieval Studies (Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA)

Speakers—Dr. Matthew Z. Heintzelman,

Dr. James Walters, Dr. Jennifer Carnell,

Dr. Ani Shahinian

Topics—Saints from East and West:

Hagiography across Cultures and Languages;

Data Migration and Access: Rediscovering

HMML's European Manuscript Microfilm

Collections; Manuscript Catalogs (Online or

in Print) for Tracking Down Manuscripts in

European Libraries

MAY 19, 2024

Speaker Series, St. John's Episcopal Church (Washington, DC, USA)

Speaker—Fr. Columba Stewart, OSB

Topic—Voices of the Ancestors: Saving the World's Manuscripts from Destruction

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Dr. Daniel K. Gullo is Joseph S. Micallef director of the Malta Study Center at HMML. Wayne Torborg is director of digital collections & imaging at HMML. Margaret Bresnahan is director of communications at HMML.

Advancing Scholarship

Meet Four Scholars Completing Fellowships at HMML




Rev. Joshua Hollmann
Nicky B. Carpenter Fellowship

Concordia University,
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
Project Title: "Nicholas of Cusa's Mystical
Theology and Intellectual Heritage"
At HMML: August 21–September 1, 2023



Aklilu A. Tecleab
Swenson Family Fellowship

Hamburg University, Hamburg, Germany
Project Title: "Digitizing, Cataloging,
and Documenting Eritrean Manuscript
Libraries"
At HMML: January 22–February 15, 2024



Dr. Jan Vandeburie
Nicky B. Carpenter Fellowship

Wolf Institute, University of Cambridge, UK
Project Title: "Reform, Crusading, and
Mission after the Fourth Lateran Council:
The Impact of Jacques de Vitry's *Historia
Hierosolymitana Abbreviata*"
At HMML: February 29–March 29, 2024



Gesh Solomon
Swenson Family Fellowship

Hamburg University, Hamburg, Germany
Project Title: "Focus on the Ethiopic
Manuscripts of the Miracles of Mary, with
a Particular Emphasis on the Miracle
Cycle Traditionally Known as '*Akkonu B'asi*'"
At HMML: May 28–June 27, 2024

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Julie Dietman is assistant for advancement and library services at HMML.

A Closer Look at a Single Manuscript

By Ani Shahinian

In the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles (17:34), Luke describes the “marketplace of ideas” in Athens and places the Apostle Paul at the Areopagus hilltop, giving an account of the Christian God. From the crowd that gathered, a number of people went on to follow Paul’s teachings. Acts names two individuals specifically: Dionysius the Areopagite, who later became the bishop of Athens, and a woman named Damaris.

A collection of texts was attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite, who was active in the first century. Scholars later challenged the attribution of the writings, placing their authorship in the 5th–6th centuries and calling their author “Pseudo-Dionysius.” Nevertheless, this body of work has carried significant weight in Christian literature.

In the Armenian tradition, Step’anos Siwnets’i (685–735), bishop of Siwnik’, made the first translation of the Dionysian texts from Greek into Classical Armenian. Nearly a millennium later, Step’anos Lehats’i (or Step’anos of Poland, d. 1689), translated a Latin copy of the texts into Armenian. It is the Lehats’i translation that we find in manuscript BZAN 000438, copied by a priest named Ghazar Jughayets’i (Lazarus of Jugha) in 1711 and now in the collection of Our Lady of Bzummār Convent in Lebanon.

The first page contains the opening of Heavenly Hierarchy (one of four Pseudo-Dionysian texts). One can see the layers of translation—Armenian from Latin from Greek, now translated here into English:

“From the Father of Lights. Every good thing whether of nature or grace proceeds forth from God the Father. And, to the Father the origin of all things that exist is related to, [directed] upward to him. As he is the origin of divinity and light, he is also the origin of radiance.”

Above the text, the illuminated word “ԱՄԵՆԱՅՆ,” meaning every/all, is written in *t’rch’nagir* script—zoomorphic letters, meant to animate and give life and breath to each letter, word, phrase on the page. The line that follows, in light blue, is in *erkat’agir* script (iron script). The lines in red and black are in *bologir* script, with rounded, full letters. Later in the manuscript, the scribe utilizes *nōtrgir*, a script used for notary and official documents.



ABOVE: An opening page to *The works of Dionysius, the Areopagite*, in the collection of Our Lady of Bzummār Convent in Bzummār, Lebanon. (BZAN 000438, folio 5)

At the top of the page, a headpiece called a *kisakhoran* (half-altar) serves as an altar to incorporate the incarnational nature of the written words. A collage of colors, it recalls the Garden of Eden and Paradise, depicting two peacocks with a fountain of water; fruits and flowers; and, to the right of the *kisakhoran*, an Armenian cross with flourishing vegetative edges on all four points, resembling the four corners of the Earth.

The author of these texts employed imagery and symbols to awaken the human imagination and to bridge the material and spiritual worlds. The manuscript followed suit, transporting the reader to new realms.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Ani Shahinian is cataloger of Armenian manuscripts at HMML.

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“Ever since people started recording information, there’s been a need to duplicate it.”

—Opening lines of a 1977 commercial for a Xerox duplicating machine, featuring the actor Jack Eagle as the scribe “Brother Dominic.”

LEFT: Mr. Jack Eagle (right), star of medieval-monastic parody commercials for Xerox Corporation, visited HMML in 1979 to see another way that modern technology (microfilm) enables the copying of manuscripts. Mr. Eagle is pictured with HMML founding director Fr. Oliver Kapsner, OSB, (left) and Fr. Wilfred Theisen, OSB, (center) assistant director of HMML in the 1970s and 1980s. Image courtesy of the Saint John’s University Archive.